

## WEED ALERT!

On July 3, 1990, Chapter 90-313 was approved and became law. The general public, members of the nursery industry and water resource managers need to be aware of the serious threat to Florida's environment posed by Schinus terebinthifolius, Melaleuca quinquenervia, Casuarina equisetifolia and Casuarina glauca and penalties provided by this law.

### **Melaleuca quinquenervia (Cav.) Blake**

melaleuca, punk tree, cajeput, bottle-brush tree, paper-bark tree

Melaleuca (Myrtaceae: myrtle family) is a large (80-100 feet height) evergreen tree with a slender crown and white, many-layered, papery bark, native to Australia-Malaysia. Original plantings in Florida started about 1906, uses were as an ornamental, commercial timber, cover for deer, and as a vehicle to dry up the Everglades to decrease mosquitoes and allow development. Melaleuca grows very densely, crowding-out native vegetation, but providing suboptimal habitat and very little food for birds and other wildlife. Melaleuca grows very quickly (3-6 feet per year), and has become very abundant in disturbed wet pine flatwoods, marshes and swamps of south Florida, and is rapidly displacing cypress and sawgrass in the Everglades. Plants are cold sensitive but are found as far north as Gainesville.

Melaleuca flowers up to five times per year. Small white flowers are crowded in terminal spikes (three inches long) or groups of spikes on woody axes. Inflorescences resemble a bottle-brush, hence the common name "bottlebrush tree." The reddish-brown seeds are small (0.5-1.0 mm) and contained in woody seed capsules (about 250 seeds per capsule). Seeds are viable 10 years and a single tree can store 2-20 million seeds that are released when the tree is stressed or killed. Seeds need moist soil to germinate. Leaves are dark green and very aromatic when crushed. Melaleuca spreads by prolific seed production and adventitious root spread. Cut trees quickly resprout from trunks and roots. Saplings are killed by fire, mature trees are not harmed and release seeds. Melaleuca is considered the most serious threat to the Everglades ecosystems.